

The November Persecutions of 1938

ANASTASIA SCHWARZLEDER

The month of November, 1938, had started on a dreary note in Berlin; it had been raining for several days; the skies were dark and clouded.

On the fifth, my father's younger brother had left Germany with his family and his orchestra. Of course, we were glad to see him get out of the infernal country, yet we felt sad at seeing a near relative leave us. Now, besides us, my grandparents and my father's older brother were the only members of our large family still in Berlin.

The ninth of November lay two days ahead; it was to be the fifteenth anniversary of Hitler's march to the Munich "Feldherrnhabe" in 1923, on which occasion a considerable number of Nazis were killed. We knew that this day was always an occasion for new ordinances — one can hardly call them laws — affecting the Jews.

That seventh of November all newspapers bore large red headlines; all public loudspeakers in the streets blurted out the fact that the Polish Jew, Hershel Grynszpan, had shot the German attache, von Rath, in Paris.

There was mourning among the Jews in Germany that day, for everyone knew that this was the long-sought pretense for the most ferocious persecutions the country had seen since the dark ages. For two days we anxiously devoured every newspaper article, hoping that the German would live, thus averting, or at least postponing, a disaster for the Jews in Germany.

At two o'clock on the morning of November the ninth, we were awakened by a clattering noise. We looked outside; a gang of Hitler youth was breaking the

windows of a Jewish dry goods store across the street. We knew then that the news of von Rath's death had been the signal for mass persecutions. These gangs that broke the first windows were no mob; they were organized bands who did their job systematically. No mob, however, needs much encouragement to start plundering and murdering. That noon when my mother went to the grocery she saw a mob again battering one of the exclusive cosmetic and perfume stores, stealing everything within reach. One brave German's suggestions that all Jews should be soaked in gasoline and set afire was answered with shouts of "kill them! Beat them to death! Burn them!" The crowds were literally drunk with destruction, just as the Paris mob had been on the night of St Bartholomew or the Reign of Terror.

Later in the day we heard that they were breaking into Jewish homes. We kept our doors locked, our lights out, and went about in our stocking feet because our apartment was above that of a confirmed Nazi, one of those fanatic adherents to the party who would gladly kill a Jew or anyone else. We were so quiet that we could hear our own hearts beat.

Down the street they were trying to break into a kosher meat market; unhappily for the mob the owner was in the habit of pulling shutters down at night, shutters that were too heavy to tear down.

With traditional German thoroughness every Jewish store had been marked for just such an eventuality. Each window bore the name of the owner in large white lettering as well as a yellow "J", a paint job paid for by the owners. On the fatal day, trucks loaded with Hitler youth went

along the streets, each gang in a specified district, checking and destroying each store systematically.

The next day we saw the full extent of the destruction, display windows were empty, pieces of wood had hastily been nailed over the broken glass. It was a picture of horror and desolation. Fire had been set to every synagogue in Germany. The one in our neighborhood had once been one of the most beautiful in the country with its mosaic ceiling and colored glass windows. Now it was a sad looking roofless skeleton, a monument of Nazi culture.

Friends of ours who owned a store down the street showed us what had been

done to their place. In their apartment in back of the store every piece of furniture had been broken, the wallpaper and the upholstery torn. They were asleep when the crowds broke in. Without putting on even a coat they went out through the back door and hid in a neighbor's apartment. For hours they heard the mob breaking everything. When they returned they found a gold watch and three hundred marks missing along with most of the jewelry.

The newspapers reporting the "outbreak of popular disgust" said, "the populace, knowing Jewish merchandize to be trash, left everything untouched."

Winter

JACQUILINE CRIST

The snow had turned Indianapolis into a fairyland. For three days there was a steady downfall of large clinging flakes. The houses looked like tiny white doll-houses, and the ground was a blanket of down. Pure white trees stretched their limbs toward an ice blue sky. The chill on the air turned Christmas shoppers into red-nosed, rosy-cheeked bundles of wool, fur, and packages. Santa Clauses of all sizes and shapes were packing them in at the department stores. Children dreamed of stockings "hung by the chimney with care", new sleds or bicycles, dolls with human hair, regiments of little tin soldiers. In the kitchens mothers were baking cookies and cakes planning the Christmas din-

ner, and trying to think of a good place to hide Dad's new pipe.

Indianapolis bustled with activity. At night many of our outdoor boys and girls scurried toward Lake Sullivan, which means ice skating at its best. Clad in jeans, bright plaid shirts, red corduroy jackets, and brilliantly colored scarfs, the skaters presented a colorful picture in the firelight against the midnight blue of the sky and the white of the hills and trees in the background. A slightly off-tune "White Christmas" filled the air as the happy group around the campfire rendered their favorite song. Around midnight a tired, chilled, but happy gang of teen-agers headed for home. Soon our town became quiet and tranquil. Night reigned.